

**ADOLESCENT TOBACCO USE IN MASSACHUSETTS  
TRENDS AMONG PUBLIC SCHOOL STUDENTS  
1984-1996**

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

**Background**

In order to examine the prevalence of adolescent substance use, including tobacco, the Massachusetts Department of Public Health, in cooperation with the Massachusetts Department of Education, conducts studies of public high school and secondary school students. The results reported here are the findings from the fifth study in this series, which began in 1984. Surveys of students across the United States have shown an increase in cigarette smoking among teenagers since 1991, a trend also seen in Massachusetts until the present study, which shows that smoking among adolescents in the state did not change substantially from 1993 to 1996. The main objectives of this report are to describe adolescent tobacco use in Massachusetts, assess changes over time, and compare state and national tobacco data

**Method**

A total of 6,844 students in grades 6-12, from 171 schools in 90 communities across Massachusetts, participated in the survey. The sixth grade was included in the prevalence study for the first time. Data were collected over a three month period, from November 1996 through January 1997. School and class selection were random; participation was voluntary and all responses were anonymous. The questionnaires were administered by independent, trained survey administrators. The study was conducted by Health and Addictions Research, Inc.

**Major Findings**

Cigarette smoking in most grades has held steady from 1993, with the exception of a moderate decrease in lifetime (ever used) smoking in grades 7-8, and an increase in current (past month) smoking for grades 10 and 11. Use of smokeless tobacco dropped sharply, especially among younger students. Most of the change in cigarette use was among males, with declining lifetime and current smoking in grades 7-8 and an increase in current smoking in grades 9-12. In 1996, current smoking was highest among whites, both at the secondary and high school level. Cigarette use among black and Hispanic students in grades 7-8 declined from 1993 to 1996. Many students who smoke considered quitting in the six months prior to the survey.

For 8th, 10th and 12th graders, Massachusetts adolescents had higher rates of lifetime and current cigarette smoking than adolescents nationally in 1996. Data from the Monitoring the Future study showed an increase in both lifetime and current smoking in these grades nationwide between 1993 and 1996, an increase also found among Massachusetts 10th graders. However, no statistically significant changes in smoking were observed among Massachusetts 8th and 12th graders from 1993 to 1996.

- In 1996, lifetime cigarette use in grades 7-8 was 42%, down from 45% in 1993, while current use for these grades in 1996 was 21%, close to the 1993 rate of 23%.
- Lifetime cigarette use in grades 9-12 was 62% in 1996 and current use was 36%, both virtually unchanged from 1993.
- Cigarette smoking dropped considerably for males in grades 7-8, from a 1993 lifetime prevalence of 52% to 43% in 1996, and from a 1993 current prevalence of 25% to 19% in 1996. Current smoking among 9-12th grade males increased from 31% to 35%. Females at both grade levels reported no statistically significant changes in cigarette smoking.
- In grades 7-8, Hispanic current cigarette use dropped from 27% in 1993 to 18% in 1996, black current cigarette use dropped from 22% to 16%, while use among whites stayed level. In grades 9-12, the only statistically significant change was among Hispanics, whose current cigarette smoking increased from 25% to 31%.
- The average age for smoking a first whole cigarette in grades 7-12 was 12.2 years, level with 1993.
- In grades 7-12, 37% reported smoking everyday in the past month, and 38% smoked between 2 and 5 cigarettes a day. The majority of smokers (94%) reported that they obtained cigarettes from friends
- Seven out of ten (71%) of those who smoke in grades 7-8 and three-quarters (76%) of students in grades 9-12 who smoke considered quitting in the six months prior to the survey.
- One in five (21%) students in grades 7-8 and almost a third (32%) of students in grades 9-12 reported that they would definitely or probably use cigarettes in the following year, percentages very close to those reported in 1993.
- Lifetime use of smokeless tobacco in grades 7-8 dropped from 16% in 1993 to 9% in 1996, while current use dropped from 6% to 2%. In grades 9-12, lifetime smokeless tobacco also declined, from 25% to 20%, and current use dropped from 9% to 6%. Use of smokeless tobacco remained highest among white males.